

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY  
HISTORIC SITE SUMMARY SHEET

Survey #: P.G. #68-43 Building Date: 1926, 1951  
Building Name: St. James Roman Catholic Church Complex  
Location: 3628, 3700, 3706 Rhode Island Avenue, Mt. Rainier, Maryland  
Private/Church/Occupied/Good/Accessible

Description

St. James Roman Catholic Church is a one story Romanesque Revival Church constructed with a steel skeleton sheathed in buff brick and trimmed in stone. The church has a modified rectangular plan with two full height projections to the south of the east and west facades. The building is encircled by a molded stone water table separating the high basement from the first story. The building's gable roofs are covered with half-round terra cotta tiles. The church entrance is on the south (Rhode Island Avenue) facade. The entrance has a double wooden door topped by a multi-light square transom. The slightly recessed entry is sheltered by a single, rounded arch portal with engaged columns and tympanum with low relief carving. Above the gable-end portal is a row of five multi-light rounded arch clerestory windows. Above the clerestory is a niche containing a stone statue. Surmounting the gable end main facade is a stone cross. Attached to the rear (north) of the Church is the St. James School building, two stories in height and constructed of and ornamented with materials identical to those used in the church.

Significance

The St. James Roman Catholic Church complex is significant for the contributions it makes to the architectural, religious and educational development of Mt. Rainier's downtown survey area. The most prominent building of the complex is the St. James Roman Catholic Church and school. The building was designed by the prominent Washington, D.C. architectural firm of Murphy & Olmsted and erected in 1926. Frederick Vernon Murphy and Walter B. Olmsted maintained an architectural practice in Washington, D.C. from 1911 to 1937. Their practice is noteworthy for the number of religious and educational buildings they designed, including many buildings at Catholic University and numerous Roman Catholic parish churches throughout the metropolitan area and elsewhere. Frederick Murphy is significant as the organizer and first head of the School of Architecture at Catholic University, established by him in 1911.

Acreage:

DOE    yes    no

**city, town** Upper Marlboro **state** Maryland

## 7. Description

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<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved      date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

St. James Rectory  
3628 Rhode Island Avenue

3628 Rhode Island Avenue is a two story, rectangular plan building constructed of cinder block and faced with buff brick. (See Slide #64.) The building is surmounted by a hipped roof covered with standing seam copper. The building has a molded stone water table at the base of the first story. The three bay main (south) facade has a centered single wooden entrance door with a semi-circular transom. The entrance surround is of stone with two engaged spiral arris columns and carved capitals supporting a plain projecting gable end pediment. The entrance is reached by a flight of stone and concrete steps enclosed by a wrought iron railing. Flanking the entrance at the first story are single, small 6/6 sash double-hung windows with brick sills, surmounted by slightly recessed semi-circular brick panels with stone keystones. Across the second story facade are three 6/6 sash double-hung windows with plain brick lintels and sills. The center bay window is slightly smaller than those flanking it. The building is in excellent repair and all materials and details appear to be original.

St. James Roman Catholic Church and School  
3700 Rhode Island Avenue

St. James Roman Catholic Church is a one story Romanesque Revival Church constructed with a steel skeleton sheathed in buff brick and trimmed in stone. (See Slides #65-68.) The church has a modified rectangular plan with two full height projections to the south of the east and west facades. The building is encircled by a molded stone water table separating the high basement from the first story. The building's gable roofs are covered with half-round terra cotta tiles.

The church entrance is on the south (Rhode Island Avenue) facade. The entry is reached by a flight of steps partially enclosed by brick cheek walls with stone caps. The entrance has a double wooden door topped by a multi-light square transom. The slightly recessed entry is sheltered by a single, rounded arch portal with engaged columns and tympanum with low relief carving. Above the gable-end portal is a row of five multi-light rounded arch clerestory windows. Above the clerestory is a niche containing a stone statue. Surmounting the gable end main facade is a stone cross.

The east and west facades are largely identical and have matching full height square plan gable-end projections to the south containing secondary entrances and several small windows. The secondary entrances have round arch lintels with low relief carved stone tympanums. Both the east and west facades have round arch multi-paned, metal clad opaque glass windows separated by engaged brick buttresses with stone caps. The center of the east facade has a small flat roof square plan brick projection.

Attached to the rear (north) of the Church is the St. James School building. It is two stories in height and constructed of and ornamented with materials identical to those used in the church. The school has a "C" shaped plan with an orientation perpendicular to that of the church. There are full height pavillions at the extreme east and west that project to the south toward Rhode Island Avenue. The south facades of these projections are gable ended and unfenestrated. There are centered one story stone trimmed alcoves at the first story. Each story of the school's other facades is fenestrated with a run of wood frame multi-paned sash double-hung windows.

To the east of the school is a two story flat roof, buff brick addition connected by a full height hyphen. The addition is rectangular in plan and is oriented like another pavillion projecting to the south towards Rhode Island Avenue. The south facade of the pavillion is unfenestrated and the remaining facades of this later addition have multi-pane sash double-hung windows.

With the exception of the flat roofed addition to the school which is a later addition, the church and school were designed as a unit and appear to have retained their original configuration and materials and are in good repair.

Sisters of the Holy Cross Convent  
3706 Rhode Island Avenue

3706 Rhode Island Avenue is a three story rectangular plan building constructed of cinder block and faced with buff brick. (See Slide #69). The building has an L-shaped one story brick projection wrapping around the main (south) and southern portion of the west facade with a shed roof. The first story shed roof and the hip roof surmounting the three story section of the building are both covered in standing seam copper. The building is encircled by a molded stone water table at the base of the first story.

The first story projection of the main (south) facade is four bays wide and contains a single wooden door entrance set in a slightly recessed rounded arch at the second bay (from the west). The first, third and

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Description (continued)

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fourth bays each contain a single 6/6 sash double-hung window. The second story has three small 6/6 sash double-hung windows across the facade. At the third story are three similar though taller windows immediately below the overhang of the roof. The east and west facades are similarly fenestrated. The building is in excellent repair and all materials and details appear to be original.

# 8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates / c. 1926, c. 1951, 1954

Builder/Architect Murphy & Olmsted/Walton & Madden

check: Applicable Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D  
and/or

Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Level of Significance: ☐ national ☐ state ☐ local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

St. James Roman Catholic Church Complex

Contributing

The St. James Roman Catholic Church complex is significant for the contributions it makes to the architectural, religious and educational development of Mt. Rainier's downtown survey area. The complex is composed of three buildings erected on Lots 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 of Yost's Addition to Mt. Rainier, on the north side of Rhode Island Avenue near the Mt. Rainier-Brentwood boundary line. The buildings of the complex each have varying degrees of significance but as an ensemble, all contribute to the history of the community's development and are among the most prominent buildings in the downtown streetscape.

The complex is architecturally significant for several reasons. Each building of the complex is one of the few in the survey area whose design can be attributed to an architect, in each case an individual or firm practicing locally. Although designed and erected at different times and by different architects, the St. James buildings together form a varied but complimentary group. The architectural tone of the complex is set by the high style Romanesque Revival Church and school building, the first to be erected. The secondary buildings of the group, the Rectory and the Convent are less highly styled but clearly complimentary in their massing and materials.

The most prominent building of the complex is the St. James Roman Catholic Church and school. The building was designed by the prominent Washington, D.C. architectural firm of Murphy & Olmsted and erected in 1926. Frederick Vernon Murphy and Walter B. Olmsted maintained an architectural practice in Washington, D.C. from 1911 to 1937. Their practice is noteworthy for the number of religious and educational buildings they designed, including many buildings at Catholic University and numerous Roman Catholic parish churches throughout the metropolitan area and elsewhere. Frederick Murphy is significant as the organizer and first head of the School of Architecture at Catholic University, established by him in 1911.<sup>1</sup>

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Statement of Significance (continued)

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Murphy was born in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin in 1879 and came to Washington in 1899 to work in the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury. He left Washington to complete his architectural education in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, graduating in 1909. While head of the Catholic University Department of Architecture, Murphy maintained a private practice with Walter B. Olmsted. Olmsted, a native of Spring Mills, New York, had also come to Washington to work with the Office of the Supervising Architect. After Olmsted's death in 1937, Murphy established a partnership with Thomas H. Locraft, a graduate of the Catholic University School of Architecture who succeeded Murphy as its head when the former retired in 1949. Murphy retired from private practice in 1954 and died in Washington in 1958.

The flat roof addition to the School building designed by Murphy and Olmsted was designed by the Prince George's County architectural firm of Walton & Madden in 1951.<sup>2</sup> Although the building does not share the terra cotta gable roof of the early school its materials and fenestration are sympathetic compliments to the existing structure. The partnership of John Walton, Sr. and Dennis Madden also designed the Rectory and Convent Buildings that completed the St. James Complex when they were erected in 1954. In their designs for these buildings Walton and Madden chose materials and massings that were complimentary to the existing church and school. Both buildings are scaled and fenestrated as secondary buildings within the complex and are largely residential in use and character. Of particular note is the stone entry portal of the Rectory that echoes the Romanesque motifs of Murphy and Olmsted's St. James Church facade.

In addition to the architectural contribution made by the St. James complex to the streetscape, is its role in the history of the development of religious and educational institutions in Mt. Rainier. Within the survey area, the St. James complex is the only site that was originally developed and in continued use by a religious institution. While there are a number of churches presently located within the survey area other than St. James, they are all located in early 20th century commercial buildings that have been adopted for religious uses.

The present church complex is not the original site for the institution which was formed by a group of Mt. Rainier residents by 1908. In that year the church built its first building at 36th Street and Bunker Hill Road.<sup>3</sup> As the number of parishoners grew, a larger facility was needed and by late 1923 the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore, of which St. James was then a part, acquired the lots in Yost's Addition for a new church.<sup>4</sup> The present church and school building were erected by 1926 from a design by prominent church architects, Murphy and Olmsted. In 1948, title to the property was transferred to the Archdiocese of Washington (see Chain of Title). The school building was occupied until 1972 and is presently vacant.<sup>5</sup>

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Statement of Significance (continued)

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Notes

1 The discussion of Murphy and Olmsted, et al is taken from an unpublished document entitled "A Preliminary Listing of the Works of the Following Architectural firms, the Principles of Whom Were Associated in Practice and As Faculty Members at the School of Architecture, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.;;...." by John C. Murphy and Michael V. Murphy, 15 April 1985.

2 Interview with Dennis Madden, architect, 18 December 1987.

3 City of Mt. Rainier 75th Anniversary Book, 1985, p. 118.

4 Prince George's County Land Records, 207:36.

5 The City of Mt. Rainier...., p. 118.



## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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See Notes, #8

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Tax Map 49

Quadrangle name Washington East D

Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A 

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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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E 

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G 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Howard S. Berger, Consultant

organization Historic Preservation Commission date March 1988

street & number 14741 Gov. Oden Bowie Drive telephone 952-4609

city or town Upper Marlboro state Maryland 20772

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
Shaw House  
21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 269-2438

## Chain of Title

St. James Roman Catholic Church and School Complex  
 3628 Rhode Island Avenue - Rectory  
 3700 Rhode Island Avenue - Church and School  
 3706 Rhode Island Avenue - Sisters of the Holy Cross

1111:5 21 December 1948 Deed	Francis P. Keough, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Baltimore to Patrick A. O'Boyle, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Washington. Grantor conveys Lots 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14, Yost's Addition to Mt. Rainier. Plat recorded RNR 2:50. Same obtained from Peter J. and Mary D. Hagan, 12 November 1923, 207:36.
207:36 12 November 1923 Deed	Peter J. and Mary D. Hagan to Michael Joseph Curley, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Baltimore. Grantors convey Lots 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14. Same obtained from Frank M. and Grace R. Coward, 7 November 1923, 203:303.
203:303 7 November 1923 Deed	Frank M. and Grace R. Coward to Peter J. Hagan. Grantors convey Lots 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14. Same obtained from John C. Yost, 16 August 1920, 157:43.
157:43 16 August 1920 Deed	John C. and Emma V. Yost to Frank M. Coward. Grantors convey Lots 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14. To clear title, this deed is made.





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St James Roman Catholic Church  
Complex

Prince Georges County, MD

Howard Berger

Fall 1987

SW

Neg: MD Historical Trust

Annapolis, MD



P.G.# 68-93

St. James Roman Catholic Church  
Complex

Prince George's County, MD

Howard Berger

Fall, 1987

SE

Neg: MD Historical Trust  
Annapolis, MD





P.G. # 68-43

St. James Roman Catholic Church  
Complex

Prince George's County, MD

Howard Berger

Fall 1987

S  
Neg: MD Historical Trust  
Annapolis, MD